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Mrs Wendy Gill
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Gill

Short inspection of Escomb Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 February 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is an inclusive school where pupils thrive in the nurturing, happy and safe atmosphere. You are highly committed to ensuring that pupils develop good personal and social skills and achieve as well as possible. Under your determined and caring leadership, with strong support from your deputy headteacher and leaders at all levels, staff share your vision and work together successfully to share their expertise. Pupils make a very positive contribution to the school through their exemplary behaviour and friendly, caring attitudes towards each other.

You have in-depth knowledge of the strengths and areas for further development across the school. Continuing improvement is supported by incisive development planning that is focused on the most important priorities. Governors understand the school's performance in detail and are highly committed to their roles. Following a recent health check, governance has improved and governors now make sure they are up to date with training and have a full understanding of their responsibilities. As a result, they provide effective support and challenge to leaders.

The area for improvement from the previous inspection has been dealt with successfully. In particular, you have brought about an improvement in the quality of teaching by increasing the challenge for the most able and by making the most of the innovative and rich curricular experiences you provide for pupils. You have also

correctly identified that experimental skills in science still require further improvement.

You have wisely extended the roles of leaders, especially in English and mathematics, and your leadership team has been successful in checking the quality of teaching and learning, which has improved significantly since the last inspection. Leaders now have a clear oversight of the strengths and further developments needed in their subject areas to ensure that school improvements are applied consistently. Their expertise is being used to good effect to increase teachers' understanding of the expectations in reading, writing and mathematics, for example through presentations and checking of work in staff meetings, and by modelling lessons. You recognise that the leadership of science could be developed further.

Teaching in almost all classes is pitched at the right level to enable the majority of pupils to make expected and sometimes better than expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Teaching is typically motivating, exciting and interesting for pupils.

Parents who responded to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, are overwhelmingly positive in their views about the school. Pupils, too, were enthusiastic in discussing the many things they enjoy about Escomb Primary. They are proud to be at the school and enjoy taking responsibilities such as VIPs (Voice in Pupils), buddies and Rights Respecting Ambassadors. One pupil summed up his feelings by telling me: 'Every morning I arrive, the teachers smile at me – I feel happy for the rest of the day.' The vast majority of parents have every confidence in your leadership and referred frequently to 'the headteacher's care and interest in pupils' and staff's 'friendly and welcoming' approach.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, staff and governors have established a clear culture of safeguarding in the school. You act as the designated safeguarding lead and ensure that all safeguarding procedures are thorough, well understood by all staff and followed rigorously. Your checks on staff and all safeguarding policies meet statutory requirements. Staff have completed relevant training and are kept up to date with any changes so they know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's welfare. Parents are clear that their children are well looked after and are safe at the school. Moreover, pupils say that they feel safe and they know who to turn to if they have any concerns.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Detailed records are kept up to date, and are used effectively to inform actions and next steps. Staff and governors receive appropriate training so that they know how to keep pupils safe from harm.

Inspection findings

- You provide clear direction to ensure that the school continues to improve. Your development planning is sharply focused on raising pupils' achievement further, especially in ensuring that the most able pupils do as well as they can in reading, writing and mathematics, and by promoting pupils' personal and social skills and learning across the curriculum.
- Throughout school pupils make good progress. However, last year, although the proportion of pupils achieving expected standards was well above the national average, the proportion of most able pupils achieving at greater depth was broadly average. Recognising a need to improve this, you ensured a focused approach with this group of pupils. These pupils now make consistently good progress and a much larger proportion are on track to achieve better than expected standards at the end of this year. Those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported effectively and make at least good progress. Teaching for this group is precise and explicit, which helps them to fill the gaps in their learning and catch up.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils and this is largely responsible for the high standards. You recognise there is, however, a need to ensure pupils improve the presentation of their work, especially their handwriting. Too few pupils write neatly and in a fluent joined style, even in Year 6, and this prevents them writing legibly at speed
- You provide a broad curriculum which generally promotes pupils' all-round development well. However, while pupils effectively increase their knowledge and understanding in a wide range of subjects, their development of skills in working scientifically are not sufficiently encouraged or promoted. As a result, pupils do not plan experiments, make predictions or test hypotheses well enough.
- The development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is a strength across the school that is valued by parents and pupils alike. Pupils have a good understanding of the school's rules and values, and why it is important to uphold them. The links with schools in Japan, Tanzania, Botswana and Bangladesh provide excellent channels for pupils' learning of other cultures. In addition, pupils learn about other faiths and are developing a good understanding of the diversity of British society and British values.
- Provision in the early years is well organised and motivating. Some children start with knowledge and skills below those which are typical for their age, especially in communication, language and literacy. Children make consistently good progress to achieve the expectations for their age by the end of the Reception Year and a growing number exceed the expectations.
- Children are stimulated with enjoyable books, well-considered resources and imaginative activities that build on their knowledge and experience. Adults provide timely prompts and encouragement to help the children learn and develop effective behaviours for learning. There are plentiful opportunities for children to extend their language, reading, writing and number skills and most children reach a good level of development.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of learning in science is improved by planning a consistently challenging curriculum
- the quality of handwriting is developed across school so that, by the end of Year 6, pupils write consistently well in a legible, fluent, appropriately joined script with increasing speed.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Bywater
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the senior leadership team and other staff. A meeting was held with a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. The school's self-evaluation and improvement plans were scrutinised, along with information about pupils' progress and safeguarding documents. I listened to pupils read and talked with a group of pupils about their views of school. You accompanied me on short visits to every class in school. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school and looked at pupils' books. The 30 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including their written comments, were considered. I also took account of the 17 survey responses from staff.